



Newfoundland Breeding Bird Atlas

Atlas des oiseaux nicheurs de Terre-Neuve

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2024

Volume 4 - Issue 1

Atlas Update

How time flies! Somehow we have zoomed through the last four years and are now in our 5th and potentially final (see page 5) atlassing field season. We're incredibly thankful for all the work that the atlas volunteers have been doing! Volunteers have put in 75% of the general atlassing coverage and 50% of point counts so far, which is incredible, especially considering the relatively small number of people we have involved.

Checklists are already starting to roll in to NatureCounts, which means people have begun going out in search of breeding birds. It's more important than ever to be collecting this information, as we look into a future where more of Newfoundland has potential to be developed. To help make your atlassing the most valuable, we encourage several actions:

- 1) Look at the coverage map with square assignments toggled ON. Squares that are complete will show a black dot, which means they don't need more atlassing! Some bioacoustic data is not yet in the database, but is accounted for in the completed square dots.
- 2) Keep your Regional Coordinator(s) updated with your plans and enter your data early, especially for those doing point counts. The last thing we want is for your hard work to needlessly be duplicated, and knowing everyone's updated plans helps put all the hours to their best work.
- 3) Always include Breeding Evidence codes, even if it is just an H or S. This helps as much data go into the final product as possible.
- 4) Shorter checklists are better: do your best to keep checklists under 1-2 hours long, or less than 5 km in distance. This helps keep the data at a finer scale to be associated with habitat and location.
- 5) If you have spent over 12-20 hours in a square, you can move on to new square, even if it is the adjacent square and is low priority. More squares done equals a better final product.

As we go into this field season, we hope that everyone gets a chance to see new places, find exciting species, and appreciate the chance to observe the interesting and wonderful behaviours of our local birds.

Progress To Date:

Checklists: 10,658

Registered volunteers: 132

Squares with data: 700

Records: 95,197

Breeding species: 184

Hours of atlassing: 9,387

Point counts: 2,926

Current as of 14 May 2024



Harlequin Ducks. Breeding evidence: FY (fledged young)

Photo: Darroch Whitaker

A publication of





Rock Ptarmigan with chicks. Breeding evidence: FY (fledged young)
Photo: Darroch Whitaker



Spotted Sandpiper chick.
Breeding Evidence: FY (fledged young)
Photo: Jared Clarke



Black-capped Chickadee going into a nest box. Breeding evidence: AE (adult entering)
Photo: Jill Tucker

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Cedar Waxwing nestlings. Breeding Evidence: NY. Photo: Sarah Butt

IMPORTANT DATES

- June 28—30 : Big Atlas Weekend Competition
 - June 7—July 7: Point count season
- September 14 : Volunteer Appreciation Banquet
 - September 15 : Data Entry deadline

June 28—30: Big Atlas Weekend 2024

This exciting annual event is a fun way for birders to document breeding birds and come together as a birding community. Late June is a great time to confirm breeding and fill gaps in the atlas datasets. This year's event is being coordinated by New York, Maryland and DC, Newfoundland, North Carolina, Ontario, Pennsylvania, and Puerto Rico!

SCHEDULE

- June 26 @ 7:30 pm online Kickoff
- June 28—30 Go atlassing from **June 28 @ 7:30pm to June 30 @ midnight.**
- July 3 @ 7:30 pm online Awards ceremony

Watch our website and social media for more details and event registrations.

CHALLENGES: Your chance to win!

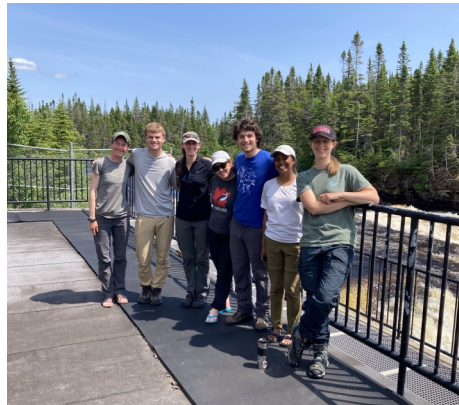
Each project will randomly select an atlasser from each of the categories below. Winners of each atlassing challenge will get a free course of their choosing from Cornell's Bird Academy.

- Nocturnal checklists (submitted between 20 minutes after sunset and 40 minutes before sunrise)
- Newly coded or upgraded species in a square
- Checklists with breeding codes from an incomplete square

Eligible checklists must be complete and submitted to NatureCounts between 6 PM June 28 and 11:59 PM June 30. All atlassing during Big Atlas Weekend will give the Newfoundland Atlas a better chance of bringing home this year's trophy!

What Does the Atlas Field Crew Do?

Atlas volunteers do a huge amount of work, but every year we supplement that coverage with our summer field staff. The number of field technicians we have relies on our funding available, which meant that last summer we were lucky enough to have 5 technicians join Catherine and Jenna in the field. This summer we have 4 technicians who have already begun to add coverage to the atlas map. Our field staff turn into travelling point count teams, covering squares on the island where there are fewer volunteers or which are more difficult to access.

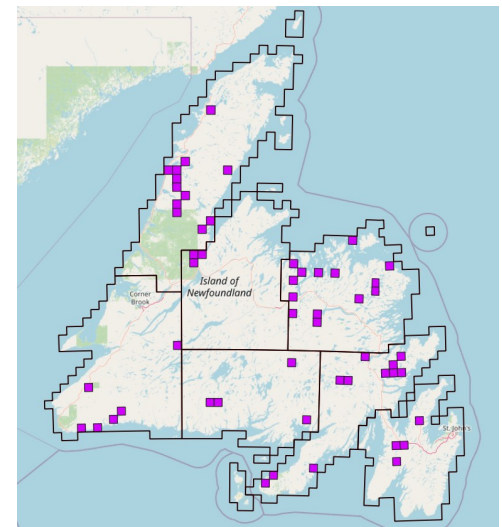


2023 field team.



Float plane views over south-central Newfoundland.

Despite the difficult and wet weather in early June last year, the field crew completed 54 squares across the island, some of which were totally remote and needed to be accessed by boat, float plane, Argo, ATV, and a lot of hiking. Many thanks to Darren Sheppard at Indian Bay Ecosystem Corporation, Bob and Lucas Efford at Clarendville Aviation, Bob Pittman at Danny Corcoran Lodge, Paul Trickett in



Squares completed by atlas field crew in 2023.

Rencontre East, Jeroen Wohe and the wonderful staff at Salmon Hole Lodge, and Justin Hodge in Charlie's Place for getting our crew into the far-flung reaches of the island. We're hoping to fill in some more big coverage gaps this summer; fingers crossed for another great season.

Species in Focus: Red Crossbill



Red Crossbill male: H.
Photo: Veronica Morrissey



Red Crossbill female: H.
Photo: Alvan Buckley

When it comes to species with interesting life history, Red Crossbills don't disappoint. They are a forest songbird and the subspecies, *percna*, is endemic to Newfoundland, meaning it is only found on the island of Newfoundland. Their call is distinct from other subspecies and they have larger bills and bodies. Red Crossbills in Newfoundland are designated as Endangered.

Red Crossbills are reliant on cone-producing forests, particularly pine trees, however, Red and White Pine are somewhat rare on Newfoundland so they also feed on the seeds from mature Black Spruce. All crossbill species have a modified beak where the upper and lower mandibles cross over each other, which allows them to pry open the scales on conifer cones to access the seeds inside. Conifer trees produce cones in cycles of low cone production and high cone production, called masting years. Because they are so reliant on cone crops, crossbills will breed any time of year and sometimes multiple times a year when conifer trees are masting and there are abundant cones, instead of just the summer months. This means that you can use breeding evidence codes all year round!

During winter they are often found at backyard feeders, and throughout the year they travel in large flocks, moving from one plentiful food source to another. Juveniles will beg and be associated with the parents for around a month after they are fully flighted and mobile, which is why in the photo at the bottom, the breeding evidence code is still just an H instead of FY.

Read more about Red Crossbills and our other species at risk [here](#).

Coming Soon: Short-eared Owl Survey

This new citizen science program will have driveable routes like the Nocturnal Owl Survey to help monitor Short-eared Owls. This species at risk is not often found in regular bird monitoring due to its cryptic nature and periods of activity. Watch for news on how to be involved this summer or in years to come.



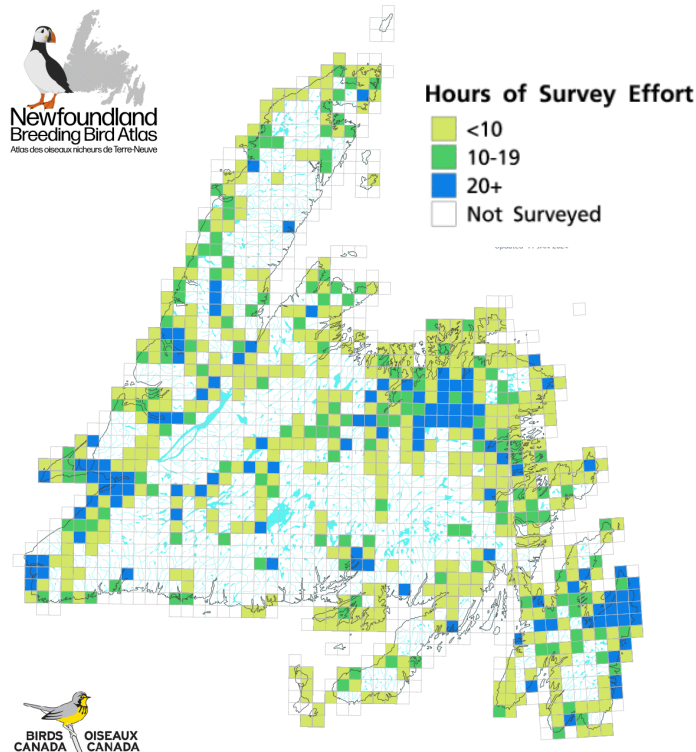
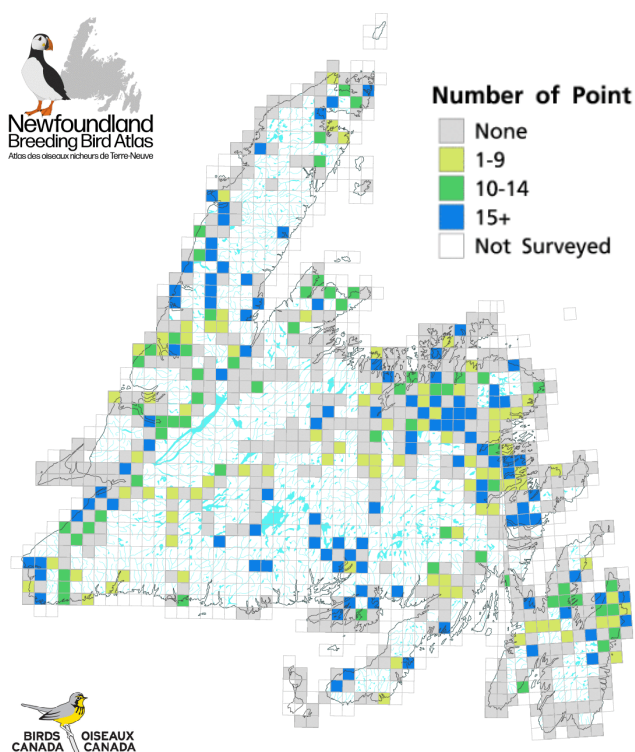
Short-eared Owl.
Photo: Scott Leslie



Red Crossbill male (right) and juvenile (left). Breeding evidence: H.
Photo: Delphine Ward

Is This the Last Year?

A question that we have been discussing between the Atlas Office, our Regional Coordinators, and Advisory Committee is whether we need to add an extra field season in 2025 to collect more data. Atlases in North America are typically 5-year snapshots of the bird life, and the Newfoundland Atlas did begin in 2020, which should make this the final year. As I'm sure you all remember, 2020 was also when the Covid-19 pandemic shut down the island, allowing neither visitors in, nor people to travel far from home, which made it a nearly lost year for data collection. As of right now we would recommend an extra year to fill in data gaps; however, this decision will not be made until after this field season and preliminary data analysis can be done to see if the species abundance models will be strong enough with our current coverage. That being said, treat this summer as the final data collection period, finish off any squares you are working on, and **please get all your data entered by September 15**. We will update all volunteers on any final decisions about adding a sixth field season as soon as we are able.



Save the Date: Volunteer Appreciation Banquet

On the evening of **September 14** we will be holding a banquet in St. John's to show our appreciation for the countless hours of effort you all put in to make the Atlas a success. We realize this is a very long way for many folks to travel, but we welcome the attendance of anyone who is able to join. We will have more details including times and a full event list in the coming months. Watch for an invitation in your email.

We hope to include a slide-show in the evening's events to showcase all of your findings and adventures as you atlas. Please send any photos of birds or atlassing to nlatlas@birdscanada.org so we can compile them ahead of the event.

Meet your Fellow Atlasser: Barry Day

The work of every atlasser is so valuable, but some volunteers go above and beyond! Barry Day is a star atlasser and has been dedicated to the Newfoundland Breeding Bird Atlas for each year of data collection. Thus far, he has collected data in 7 regions of the island, completed an incredible 353 point counts, and over 900 peak atlassing hours. Thank you, Barry!

We asked him a few questions:

When did you become interested in birds?

My interest goes back more than 20 years when I put up my first bird feeder and began paying attention to the birds that were attracted to my backyard. But my interest never expanded much beyond that until around 2010 when I began taking binoculars with me when walking my dog. From there, things escalated fairly quickly, especially after I retired in 2014.

What is your favourite bird? I don't really have a favourite. I simply enjoy the activity and whatever happens to be around at the time. Birding with friends is great, but there's nothing that can compare to being alone on a quiet spring morning, in an area far removed from any traffic noise, with the air filled with bird song.

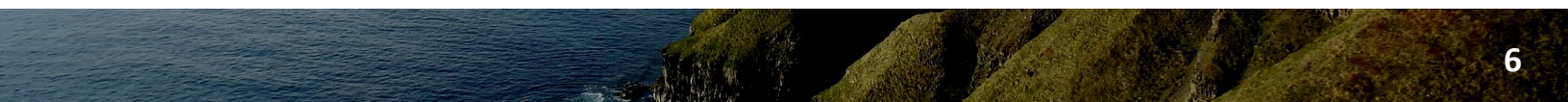
What are the best parts about atlassing? I was actively birding before the NL Atlas project began. But there were a few unexpected things that the Atlas project provided that I came to particularly enjoy. The first was learning and paying attention to the various activities that define breeding activity. I hadn't taken much time in the past to really appreciate what the birds were actually doing. Also, the Atlas project encourages birding in areas that I would not have birded regularly, simply based on the division of the province into predefined 10 km Squares. This has led to an exploration of a very wide swath of the area around my home community of Gander, and during the last 4 years as the Atlas work has progressed, it has expanded to all corners of the NE region.

Any advice for new atlasers? Find a birding buddy. It will dramatically lower the learning curve. And sharing the excitement that birding provides is contagious.



Barry Day atlassing on a wet, cold morning, looking for a Yellow-bellied Sapsucker.

Photo: Tina Randell



We are looking for photos and stories! Do you have an atlassing adventure or fantastic photo you'd like to share? We'd love to hear from you! **Send pictures and stories to the Atlas Office:** nlatlas@birdscanada.org.

Announcements

Important Dates

- If you are doing point counts, remember they must be done between **June 7 and July 7**. General atlassing can be done any time there is breeding behaviour associated with a species. July and early August can be a great time to general atlas because it's easy to upgrade breeding evidence codes, as there are plenty of fledged young and adults carrying food.
- Big Atlas Weekend 2024 is a great opportunity to interact with other atlasers across the continent while increasing breeding evidence. Don't miss out! Events are running from June 26— July 3.

Early data entry deadline this year: September 15

This year we would like all atlasers to have submitted their data from 2024 and any previous years **before September 15**. This will allow us to have the most complete picture of our coverage as we assess if we need an additional year of data collection. If you need help with data entry, please reach out to nlatlas@birdscanada.org.

Sponsor a Species!

Do you or a loved one have a favourite species and want your name to show up with it on the final Atlas publication? [Sponsor one or more species](#) to support the Atlas and have your name on the species page in the Atlas' final publication. There are four donation levels ranging from \$35 to \$1000 with a list of available species in each. Sponsorships over \$150 will also receive a print of your species once the final publication is complete! All Sponsor a Species donations will receive a charitable donations receipt.

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